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Du Pont, Coleman

The highway problem

[Washington, D.C.]

[1918]

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## The HIGHWAY PROBLEM

GENERAL COLEMAN DU PONT

*Chairman Board of National Councillors  
National Highways Association, Member  
State Highway Commission of Delaware*

*"National Highways  
will do more than any  
other one thing for  
real development and  
defense of our country"*

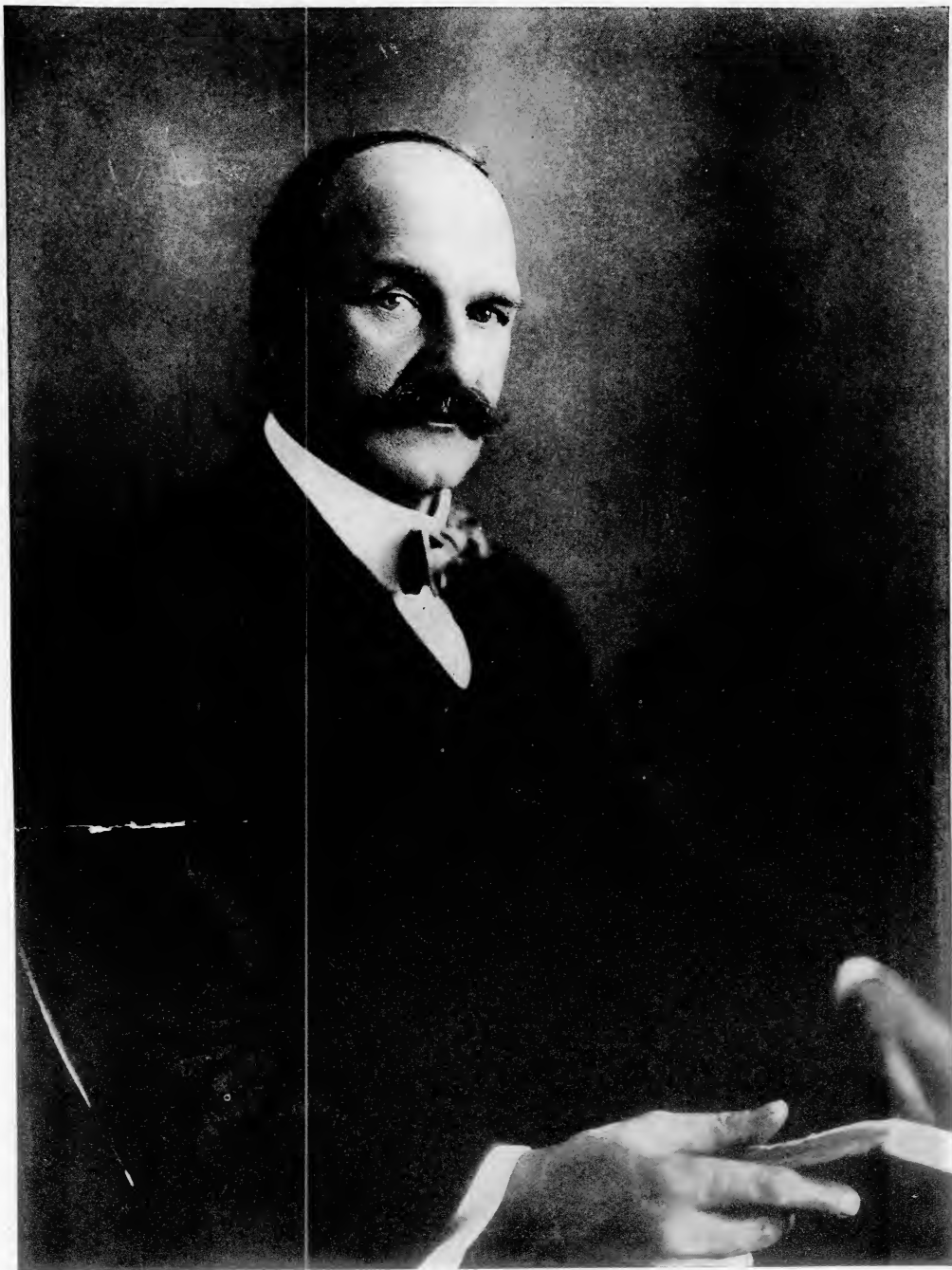
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W. W. Kimball, U.S.N., Retired

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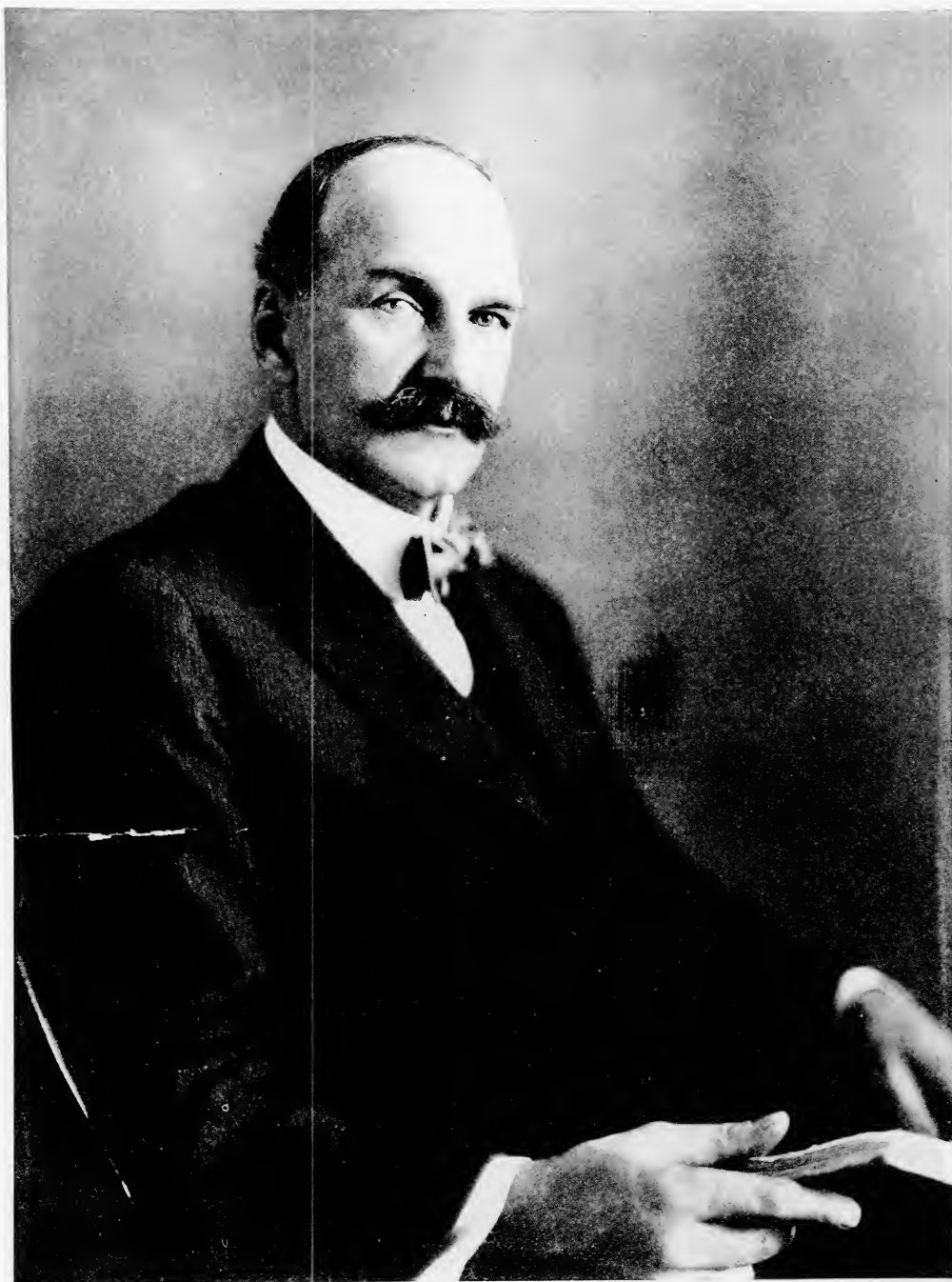


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*A born fighter, aggressive and constructive, General Coleman du Pont has been nearly everything from a day laborer to the directing head of one of the country's great industries. As a farmer, he learned the value of good roads to every community, and one of his greatest interests is road building. He has undertaken to build and give to the people of Delaware a highway extending from one end of the State to the other. Twenty miles of the highway have been completed and presented to the State.*



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## The Highway Problem

*Centralized Authority Necessary to the Development of National Highways*

GENERAL COLEMAN DU PONT

*Chairman Board of National Councillors  
National Highways Association*

*Member State Highway Commission  
of Delaware*

A NATION is rich and successful and prosperous not in proportion to its natural resources, the timber in its forests, the agricultural land which can be cultivated, the minerals or oils in its mines or wells, but in proportion to the amount of these resources which have been or can be developed.

Few countries are more blessed with natural resources than Mexico, yet Mexico is anything but prosperous.

The United States is often heralded as the richest country in the world. Had we developed all our natural resources to their fullest extent, we should be richer than all the other nations of the world combined.

The one underlying factor which affects all development of natural resources, which is at the bottom of all business, the foundation of credit, the pedestal of commerce, the rock on which prosperity stands, is transportation.

This country was hardly a nation until its east and west, its north and south were connected with railroads. It was the railroad which made southern reconstruction possible and which, sixty years after a war which left the south prostrate, has developed the southland to its present prosperity.

The United States has run the gamut of encouraging, fostering, helping, neglecting and hindering the railroads, and now, for a time, is owning and coddling them. But far-seeing men are beginning to believe, as enthusiasts and dreamers have believed for years, that the future of transportation does not rest entirely with the road of steel, though it is important, but largely with the road of stone. The past decade has developed a new factor in transportation which has as yet received scant consideration from the government. That factor is the motor truck, and it has taken a world war to make Uncle Sam, as an entity, recognize a need which hundreds and thousands of his citizens have been screaming at him for years. That need is roads.

THE United States has never had, and has not now, a road policy. It has dallied with the road question, thrown sops to road enthusiasts, played with the highway problem—and now, for the first time, is beginning to think seriously that it has other angles than local ones, other governmental uses than the provision of one more means of gaining votes. True, the United States maintains as a part of the Department of Agriculture an Office of Public Roads, which has done excellent work. There is also a Federal Aid Law in existence by which the National Government proposes to aid the various states build certain roads. Many states have been more far-sighted than the parent government, and have provided their citizens with good roads, well laid out, properly maintained, which have added greatly to the prosperity of their citizens.

But as a nation the United States has no

road policy, recognizes no road question as such, and pays only desultory attention to constructing and maintaining its land highways, while devoting millions to waterways and, in the past, millions to railways.

That this state of affairs must eventually come to an end is obvious to any who will follow to their logical conclusion the causes which have produced the small road mileage which the nation possesses. The road question was first agitated when the bicycle came into popularity. But the bicycle was not a commercial factor of sufficient power to make any headway against the fact that a nation-wide system of good roads would cost not millions but billions of dollars. The automobile came, small, weak, inefficient and unable to negotiate rough roads, either with comfort to the owner or profit to the merchant, and the good roads demand began to make itself heard. Then the motor truck was developed, and the demand for roads over which it can travel economically and efficiently is becoming louder and more insistent, with the result that many states have given heed and such road systems as those of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maryland and Ohio have resulted.

THE nation, as a nation, has done nothing. Had the development of railroads been left to the individual states to foster, should we

*Hard-surfaced roads are urgently needed  
for the traffic of 40,000 motor trucks  
now in the service of the country*



have a transcontinental line? It seems improbable. Had the states in this time of stress been left to work their legal will upon the carriers, had the railroads been left to continue competition as the primary moving force of their commercial life, would this country have solved its transportation problem of war materials and men?

If the nation can grasp and solve one angle of its transportation problem, for the sake of war efficiency, is there any reason why it cannot grasp and solve that other and equally vital question of roads and trucks?

From a military standpoint roads are sharply divided into two classes. First, the road which serves the nation as an aid, a feeder, of its railroads, which takes the burden of the short haul from the steam train, which saves time and money and roundabout routes for the shipper. Second, the road which serves as a distinct military factor for the transportation of men, munitions and supplies, primarily for mobilization, and possibly for actual combat in the—to-be-hoped unlikely—event of invasion of these shores.

At the present time the United States is concerned only with the first angle. Yet an invasion is always a possibility, though not a probability now. Three, even two years ago, it was a possibility but not a probability that we should be drawn into the world war. We elected a president who had kept us out of war and barely six months later backed him to the utmost when he said we were at war. As roads cannot be built in a day, and as mistakes in road planning are tremendously expensive to make, it is certain that, simply because the need of highways for defense purposes is not a present need, it would be foolish to ignore this possibility in any competent well laid out scheme of national road building.

NEGLECTING for the moment the creation of roads, or the improvement of existing roads, for purely defensive purposes, the pressing need of good roads for full utilization of motor trucks for war purposes is vital. The passenger car can negotiate bad roads if it must. The motor truck cannot do so, with any degree of efficiency or profit. We have steel rails for cars simply to get a smooth passage for the wheels of freight and passenger vehicles. It is as impossible for a heavy motor truck to operate economically or efficiently over rough and bumpy roads as for a railroad to carry much freight over a poor roadbed.

We have borrowed heavily from England and France in war experience. It took England years to come to conscription—we did it in months. England and France developed their air resources slowly as the war progressed—we began a gigantic air program with the war less than three months old. We have taken our Allies' experience in troop training, in officer making, in trench fighting, in ordnance



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